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ABSTRACT

The perceptions of educators working with international students in higher education regarding research needs in the field of international student affairs were surveyed. The 36 respondents were instructors and administrators of programs for English language study, international education, foreign student advising, and they represented 18 public and private universities, 4 colleges, 11 junior or community colleges, and 1 consortium. Respondents ranked each questionnaire topic on a three-point scale, also rank ordered the general research headings according to their importance to the individual and institution, and also identified other research needs. Respondents considered the impact of international students on U.S. institutions, opinion, and knowledge to be the most important research topic. Other topics they perceived essential were as follows: the content relevance of U.S. curricula, the adequacy of nonacademic services for international students, factors that facilitate students successful readjustment upon return home; cultural coexistence as a coping style, and the nature of U.S. students who are affected by the presence of international students on the campus. Respondents indicated 22 additional research topics, including female foreign student needs and language proficiency. (SW)

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RESEARCH NEEDS IN INTERNATIONAL STUDENT AFFAIRS

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RESEARCH NEEDS IN INTERNATIONAL STUDENT AFFAIRS

Research in the field of international student affairs is inadequate for use in decision-making and planning in higher education. This article describes the status of current research and reports on findings, from a study of educators in international student affairs, which identify research needs and priorities.

Dramatic growth in the numbers of international students, in U.S. higher education, is now believed to portend major changes in the character of our campuses. Not only has a report, by the American Council on Education(A.C.E.), predicted an increase of foreign students to one million by 1990 but the entire nature of this population has greatly altered (Scully,1981). The majority of international students are no longer wealthy Western Europeans but are from Asia. Thirty-five percent of all international students in the U.S. are from OPEC nations alone (A.C.E., 1980).

The issues and problems which are generated by sudden increased numbers of foreign students, in American higher education, have created an urgent need for research. The A.C.E.'s Committee on Foreign Students and International Policy, along with other concerned organizations, have confirmed that the impact of this phenomenon is "neither well understood nor receiving serious analysis" at any level of decision-making (Scully,1981,p.14).

It is clear that government and institutions of higher education are forced to make decisions about the recruitment, admission, and education of foreign students with inadequate knowledge. There are major questions to be answered. On what basis, for example, can institutions who are faced with retrenchment justify expending added resources on foreign students? What is the nature of needed resources? The A.C.E. report warns that economic considerations, in the recruitment of foreign students, are "ill-advised" and students should be considered for"the potential, less tangible benefits which can be derived from them (Scully,1981,p.14)." What are these benefits and how can they be assured? What data supports our beliefs about the impact of international students on the campus?

In short, without a systematic research base for administrative and educational decision-making, we may rightly be accused of callously recruiting foreign stu-

dents under false premises and with false promises. We may also risk the loss of critical educational opportunities and our nation's academic reputation during a time of world crisis and the internationalization of commerce.

This study was conducted to determine: 1)the status of current research on international students in the U.S. and, 2) research needs identified by educators who work with international students. The expected outcomes of this study are to provide suggestions for needed research on this trend in higher education.

CURRENT RESEARCH

It is ironic to note that the most comprehensive source of research data, on international students, is no longer in print. This invaluable compendium, The world's students in the united states: A review and evaluation of research on foreign students (Spaulding & Flack,et.al.,1976), reports on four hundred and thirty-three studies conducted during the years 1967 and 1976. The authors not only reviewed these studies but they also analyzed and evaluated them. Some of their conclusions were that:

1. The most studied topic was what happens to foreign students while in the U.S. The single most studied factor was foreign student adjustment and attitudes.
2. There is relatively little research evidence which sheds light on the impact of foreign students on American students or the surrounding environment.
3. Women students were largely ignored as subjects in most empirical studies. Single males received the most research attention.
4. Many studies concluded by recommending further research but failed to identify research needs or their relationship to the general field of

intercultural education.

The authors were critical of the research methods employed, found a lack of cohesiveness, comparability, practicality, and inconsistency of standards in the studies of foreign students.. They assert, as a major failing, that there is no conceptual or theoretical framework evolved which would enable the development of a coherent body of knowledge.

In general, Spaulding and Flack concluded that while there was a large body of research conducted during the period studied, it is simply not accesible for use in policy and implementation decisions.

Recent empirical evidence confirms some of the findings made by Spaulding and Flack. Ellis (1978) found that there was a paucity of research on non-European foreign students in the preceding decade. He also noted the narrowness of topics studied. Ellis commented on the lack of research on the interrelationships between foreign students and academic quality and relevance. The Data Collection Project (1978) noted the lack of generalizability of the studies done on individual college campuses.

The author's own review of the Education Index for articles listed during the period of July 1975 to October 1980, revealed that there were an average of six per year which were oriented towards foreign students in general. Articles also appeared under the headings of 20 different nationality groups and geographical areas. The subject of the articles, determined by title or content review, typically focused on essays, first-hand reports, and proposals for international education. There was a notable lack of research articles.

The author also reviewed, in the Spring of 1981, the library holdings of

two research institutions which emphasize their "international" missions and have large foreign student enrollments. A search of the holdings of Florida International University and the University of Miami revealed few recent titles relating to international students or intercultural education and no major research studies. There were not even copies of the valuable publications by the National Association of Foreign Student Affairs(NAFSA).

The status of research in the area of international student affairs appears to be narrow in scope, lacking theorectical bases and generalizability, and most frequently anecdotal or methodologically superficial.

SURVEY: RESEARCH NEEDS

There is an established need for a systematic research effort in the field of international student affairs. This study attempts to respond to this need by using Spaulding and Flack's(1976) classification of research topics as the basis for answering the following: What are the critical questions which need to be answered by research? Answers to this question can lead us toward a coherent research effort directed towards educational priorities.

Sample

A purposive stratified sample of administrators and faculty, who work with international students in higher education, was selected as the population to be studied. This group constitutes an "expert" population since they are often consulted for information about international student affairs and are responsible for policy and program implementation.

The population was drawn from the membership of the National Association of

Foreign Student Affairs (NAFSA) who attended a Southeast regional conference held during the Fall of 1980. Colleges and universities in the Southeast have a major share of the enrollment of international students and, along with other Sunbelt regions, will increase their share in the future (A.C.E. 1980).

The resulting sample (N=36), while small, was remarkably well-balanced in several demographic variables. Almost half of the respondents (17) were associated with English language study at colleges and universities. There was a balance between instructors of ESL and Directors of International Studies, Language Institutes, and a Consortium for International Education. The other group of respondents (19) were Foreign Student Advisors or Directors and Assistant Directorsof Foreign Student Affairs.

The organizations represented by the respondents included: 18 public and private universities, four colleges, eleven junior or community colleges, one consortium, and two organizations which were not identified. The sample represented approximately 30 percent of the participants registered for the Conference.

Instrumentation

Spaulding and Flack's(1976) classification system for research studies was used to construct a four page questionnaire,"Research Interests of Professionals who Work With International Students in Higher Education". The questionnaire duplicated the five general research headings and the wording of 33 selected research topics assessed as having significance but inadequate or contradictory research evidence.

The questionnaire asked respondents to rank each of the topics, in five sections, on a three point scale. Section VI of the questionnaire asked them to rank order

the general research headings according to their importance to the individual and institution. The last section asked respondents to provide descriptive information and invited them to make additional comments.

Procedures

Survey instruments, attached to a cover letter, were distributed to 120 Conference participants. Announcements about the survey were made at the major general sessions of the Conference. Participants were asked to complete the survey and return it to the Conference Information Desk.

Results

Six topics were identified as "essential to my program or institution" by a majority (50% or more) of survey respondents. The topic which received the strongest rating was the impact of international students on U.S. institutions, opinion, and knowledge. Research on this topic was rated "essential" by sixty-seven percent and "helpful" by twenty-four percent for a total interest rating of ninety-one percent of all survey participants.

The remaining topics which received a majority rating as "essential" were, respectively: the content relevance of U.S. curricula(60%), the adequacy of non-academic services for international students(59%), factors which facilitate students successful readjustment upon return home(58%), cultural co-existence as a coping style(56%), and the nature of U.S. students who are affected by the presence of international students on the campus(55%). Table 1 shows a ranking of these topics along with the percentage of respondents who rated them helpful and the total percentage ratings.

/INSERT TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE/

All but two of the thirty-three survey items were designated at least as "helpful" by the majority of respondents. A number of these items bear mention because of an especially high percentage of interest indicated in them (two-thirds responded that they were "essential" or "helpful").

The items which stand-out are: the effect of college or university environment on the foreign student; differential career aspirations of students, by country; the relationship between career goals of students upon their arrival in the U.S. and the career which they undertake upon return home; countries or areas of the world which send unexpectedly few students to study in the U.S.; the impact of U.S. studies on students attitudes toward their cultural, personal, and professional roles; the characteristics of "successful" grantees; the progression of attitude change based upon length of stay in the U.S. and other factors; improved statistics on international students and participant training flows in the U.S.; and, female international students and trainees. Table 2 shows the percentage of rankings on these topics along with a total percentage score reflecting overall interest, in the topic, by raters.

/INSERT TABLE 2 ABOUT HERE/

The two topics which received the least interest, rated as "not of importance to me or my institution at this time", concerned the replication and updating of previous research.

The general research area which received the most highly rated items (9 out of 11) was the category relating to what happens to foreign students while in the U.S. This finding is congruent with the way in which raters ranked the five general research categories. In order of their importance, respondents ranked the general research areas as follows:

1. What happens to students while in the U.S.
2. The effects of international students on the U.S.
3. Student's reasons for coming to the U.S.
4. The structure, administration, and finance of programs.
5. Quantitative data.

At the conclusion of each general research section area there was a space provided for "other" research topics of interest. Twenty-two topics were written-in by survey participants. The most frequently mentioned topic related to women foreign students; their career aspirations, readjustment upon return home, countries which send unexpectedly few women to the U.S. and, in general, the need for improved statistics on international students by sex.

The next most freqently listed research topic related to language proficiency and its actual relationship to academic problems and social adjustment. Despite the lack of interest in the question relating to updated data, several respondents noted specific needs for such information as: sources of non-governmental financial aid and the types of collegiate services offered at various institutions.

Discussion

Although the sample used in this study was small there was remarkable agreement between respondents and recent empirical data.

Respondents rated, as most essential, two issues found to be poorly researched and widely discussed today, that is: what is the impact of the international student presence in U.S. higher education and to what extent is our curricula relevant to their needs?

The first issue evokes long held beliefs in the value of intercultural educational exchange. Such beliefs have not yet been supported by research and, in fact, there is evidence that the presence of international students on campus does not contribute to international education in any of the ways expected. The need for adding a global dimension to the education of American students makes this question more critical than ever before.

The second major issue concerns curricular relevance for foreign students. This seems especially important to examine given the changed nature of the foreign student population. The geo-political origin of this population causes a myraid of questions to be raised about the appropriateness of the U.S. college and university curricula.

The lack of research on these two issues alone undermines our ability to develop beneficial and rational policies in the recruitment and education of both international and American students. Until we have evidence in these areas of knowledge we will not know how international student recruitment supports the goals of American higher education in general and individual institutions in particular. We will be unable to explain the value of American higher education to foreign students who consider studying here.

The four other topics, rated "essential" as research needs are partially dependent upon the first two. Resources for international student services, for example, are not only allocated based upon need but upon institutional goals and priorities. Cultural-coexistence as a coping style may be related to social factors affected by students impact on their institutional environment and foreign student's readjustment back home may be related to curricular relevance in the U.S. The first two topics,therefore, suggest real research priorities.

The general topic area which was ranked of greatest importance concerned what happens to international students while studying in the U.S. While Spaulding and Flack note an abundance of research on this topic, it has apparently not been addressed in ways which meet the demand. Perhaps this finding most dramatically demonstrates the quantity vs.quality issue in the field of international student research.

Women students now constitute a majority on American college and university campuses. It is not surprising that there is now some interest in the woman international student. Earlier research largely ignored women and while there werenot a large number of respondents citing this need, it was the most frequently cited among write-in topics. Apparently, there is so little data on the subject of women international students as to make it virtually a new area of research.

New approaches and a renewed research effort must take place in the area of international student affairs and intercultural exchange. There are new priorities, a new student composition, and serious criticisms of the quality of earlier studies. Theories and concepts from the social sciences may provide the needed structure leading to greater coherence and generalizability than in past studies. Kanter's(1977) numerical composition theory of organizational behavior may provide a theorectical base for research on the right "mix" of international and American students. Her theories might also explain the "ghetto" phenomenon observed on campuses which have large student enrollments. There <u>are</u> applicable theorectical models from which to launch credible studies.

The need for this research will become more acute in the coming decade. There are both educational and international issues at stake in the outcomes of research on international student affairs and intercultural exchange.

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TABLE 1

RESEARCH TOPICS RANKED "ESSENTIAL" BY A MAJORITY OF RESPONDENTS

Topic	Percentage of Rankings (N=36) Essential	Helpful	Total %
Impact of international students on U.S. institutions, opinion, and knowledge.	67%	24%	91%
Content relevance of U.S. curricula.	60%	31%	91%
Adequacy of non-academic services for international students.	59%	22%	81%
Factors which facilitate students successful readjustment upon return home.	58%	33%	91%
Cultural-coexistence as a coping style.	56%	34%	90%
Nature of U.S. students affected by the presence of international students on campus.	55%	33%	88%

TABLE 2

RESEARCH TOPICS RANKED AT LEAST "HELPFUL" BY TWO-THIRDS RESPONDENTS

Topic	Percentage of Rankings (N=36) Essential	Helpful	Total %
Effect of college or university environment on the student.	48%	40%	88%
Differential career aspirations, by country.	30%	57%	87%
Relationship between career goal upon arrival in U.S. and career undertaking upon return home.	29%	57%	86%
Countries or areas of the world with unexpectedly few students studying in U.S.	26%	59%	85%
Impact of U.S. studies on students attitude toward their cultural, personal, and professional roles.	49%	34%	83%
Characteristics of "successful" grantees.	47%	34%	81%
Progression of attitude change based upon length of stay in U.S. and other factors.	34%	46%	80%
Improved statistics on international students and participant training flows into the U.S.	41%	32%	73%
Female international students and trainees.	23%	45%	68%